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Viewing cable 05PARIS8544, MFA CAUTIOUS ON UNSCR 1644, SYRIA/LEBANON NEXT

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Understanding cables

Every cable message consists of three parts:

- The top box shows each cables unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
- The bottom box presents the body of the cable. The opening can contain a more specific subject, references to other cables ([browse by origin](#) to find them) or additional comment. This is followed by the main contents of the cable: a summary, a collection of specific topics and a comment section.

To understand the justification used for the classification of each cable, please use this [WikiSource](#) article as reference.

Discussing cables

If you find meaningful or important information in a cable, please link directly to its unique reference number. Linking to a specific paragraph in the body of a cable is also possible by copying the appropriate link (to be found at the paragraph symbol). Please mark messages for social networking services like Twitter with the hash tags **#cablegate** and a hash containing the reference ID e.g. **#05PARIS8544**.

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
05PARIS8544	2005-12-20 06:12	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Paris

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.al-akhbar.com/node/16545>
<http://www.al-akhbar.com/node/16461>
<http://www.al-akhbar.com/node/16545>
<http://www.al-akhbar.com/node/16546>
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<http://www.al-akhbar.com/node/16645>

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 008544

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/21/2015

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [SY](#) [LE](#) [FR](#)

SUBJECT: MFA CAUTIOUS ON UNSCR 1644, SYRIA/LEBANON NEXT STEPS

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (C) Summary: MFA DAS-equivalent for Syria/Lebanon Herve Besancenot welcomed the UNSC's unanimous adoption of UNSCR 1644, but expressed concern that international efforts to pressure Syria are losing momentum while the SARG is increasingly emboldened that it can wait out the U.S. and France over the next few years. Besancenot affirmed that the Council should be ready to seek targeted sanctions on senior Syrian officials as soon as UNIIIC finds Syria in non-compliance with UNSCR 1636, but speculated that the expected Belgian successor to Mehlis would take time before making bold moves. Besancenot described the Saudi position on pressuring Syria as wavering, while Egypt remains firm. He also described Lebanese PM Siniora as in a weak position, and stressed the need to avoid a Hizballah/Amal withdrawal from the GOL. End summary.

SYRIA PLAYING FOR TIME

2. (C) During a December 17 discussion with poloff, MFA DAS-equivalent for Egypt/Levant Herve Besancenot commended unanimous UNSC adoption of UNSCR 1644 as a good outcome. At the same time, he expressed concern that the compromises necessary to achieve consensus on 1644 and pending departure of UNIIIC Chief Mehlis had bolstered the impression that international efforts on UNSCR 1559 and 1595/1636 were losing momentum. As a result, the SARG was increasingly emboldened in its efforts to "play for time" and wait out the U.S. and France for the next few years. In Besancenot's view, the Syrians viewed Chirac as having personally "driven" the Syria/Lebanon file, and were well aware that the French president has been weakened domestically and would be gone from the scene after the 2007 presidential elections. He opined that the Syrians had made a similar calculation vis-a-vis the U.S., which Damascus viewed as bogged down in Iraq and unprepared to make a military strike against Syria, again making the "playing for time" option possible. Meanwhile, the UNIIIC investigation could take until 2006 or 2007 until it reached conclusive results.

3. (C) Besancenot agreed with poloff on the importance of insisting on Syrian cooperation with UNIIIC and not letting the SARG "play for time." He opined that UNIIIC would inevitably find Syria in non-compliance, over SARG red-lines on questioning Syrian Military Intelligence Chief Asif Shawkat or Mahir al Asad, and agreed that the Council should be ready to impose sanctions, without pre-empting UNIIIC. In Besancenot's view, sanctions should target senior SARG officials, through measures such as travel restrictions or assets freezes, without punishing the Syrian population at large. Besancenot questioned, however, how long it might take UNIIIC to make a finding of non-compliance; he speculated that Mehlis' likely successor, a Belgian magistrate (NFI), would likely seek time to settle in before launching bold moves, such as calling for further arrests or finding Syria in non-compliance.

SAUDI SUGGESTS CHOOSING STABILITY OVER TRUTH; EGYPT STAYS FIRM

4. (C) Besancenot suggesting growing pessimism on the Saudi side on Syria/Lebanon developments. He cited a discouraging conversation which French Ambassador in Beirut Emie had just had with his Saudi counterpart, who was pessimistic and suggested that the U.S. and France might need to make compromises with Damascus. Besancenot said the Saudi Ambassador concluded that the international community might have to choose between the "truth" and "stability" -- meaning, we all know that Hariri could not have been killed without Bashar Al-Asad's knowledge, but there is no alternative in Syria to Bashar. (In an aside, Besancenot expressed personal agreement with the view that there is no alternative to Bashar, and noted that he had met with

representatives of the Syria Reform Party (RPS), including Amcit Farid Ghadry, last October. Besancenot said he found the RPS representatives disconnected from Syria and unable to articulate a coherent political program.) In contrast to Saudi Arabia, Besancenot described Egypt's position towards Syria as quite firm, and said Mubarak was very tough with Shara during the latter's recent visit to Cairo. When asked by Shara what Syria needed to do, Besancenot said Mubarak responded bluntly that Syria needed to do one thing: cooperate.

15. (C) Besancenot added that prior to the Tueni assassination, the GoF had been encouraging Sa'ad Hariri to return to Lebanon, while the Saudis had been advising him to stay put. In the GoF view, Sa'ad could not stay out of Lebanon forever, but in the wake of the Tueni assassination, now was not the time to return. Meanwhile, the French embassy in Beirut had reinforced its already tight security considerably in the days since Tueni's murder.

SINIORA/HIZBALLAH

16. (C) Besancenot described PM Siniora as being in a very weak position, and cautioned against pressuring him too much in the wake of the Hizballah/Amal's suspension of participation in the GOL. Besancenot stressed the need to avoid a Hizballah/Amal formal withdrawal from the GOL, which could have dangerous consequences. He conceded that, after a brief period of moving in the direction of burnishing its Lebanese nationalist credentials, Hizballah had swung back in the direction of serving its Syrian and Iranian masters, perhaps reflecting the hardening positions in Tehran and Damascus. On the issue of Hizballah disarmament, Besancenot clarified that the GoF was not advocating inaction, and insisted that the GoF continued to urge Siniora to take measures which could help advance implementation of UNSCR 1559, including via his public statements.

17. (C) Comment: Besancenot's comments are consistent with long-standing MFA caution on Syria/Lebanon, and the tendency here to see the glass as "half-empty" when it comes to sustaining international pressure on Damascus. Though Besancenot seemed to overestimate the SARG's ability to wait out the international community and underplay the SARG's declining credibility in the wake of the latest Mehlis report and Tueni assassination, he was reassuringly firm when it came to the topic of pursuing sanctions in response to Syrian non-compliance with UNIIIC. End comment.

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<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/paris/index.cfm>

Hofmann